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ABSTRACT

This final report describes activities and achievements of a 3-year project using a public school and university partnership structure to jointly recruit, select, train, certify, and retain special educators in a high poverty rural service region of Northeastern California. Emphasis was on improvement of educational services for pupils with high incidence disabilities and their families by addressing the critical need for both quantity and quality of personnel through an innovative "on-the-job" preservice training program. Activities, accomplishments, and outcomes are detailed for each of the following five project objectives: (1) reduce shortage of qualified teachers; (2) attract and select best candidates; (3) provide accessible structure; (4) prepare effective rural teachers; and (5) fashion support structure for teacher assistance and retention. Program evaluation results based on the Government Performance and Results Act objectives are reported, noting consistent differences between student and administrator ratings. (DB)

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FINDING AND KEEPING THE BEST:

A Rural Regional Partnership for Recruiting and Retaining Teachers for Children with High-Incidence Disabilities

California State University, Chico

Award Number H325H980131

FINAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

December 1, 1998 through December 31, 2001

Submitted to U.S. Department of Education

Office of Special Education and

Rehabilitative Services

Division of Personnel Preparation

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Finding and Keeping the Best: A Rural Regional Partnership for Recruiting and Retaining Teachers for Children with High Incidence Disabilities" used a unique public school and university partnership structure to jointly recruit, select, train, certify, and retain special educators in a high poverty rural service region. California State University, Chico, the sole public institution bringing specialist education to a vast 43,000 square mile region, formed a consortium with 42 county offices and school district LEAs to offer this alternative training program.

The project's purpose was to improve the educational services for pupils with high-incidence disabilities and their families within this vast service region by addressing the critical need for both quantity and quality of personnel. This innovative "on-the-job" preservice training program addressed the following objectives:

1. Reduce Shortage of Qualified Teachers
2. Attract and Select Best Candidates
3. Provide Accessible Structure
4. Prepare Effective Rural Teachers
5. Fashion Support Structure for Teacher Assistance and Retention

The project completed its third and final year of program implementation December 31, 2001. This report summarizes project activities over the three-year span, detailing accomplishments by objective and referencing GPRA program performance indicators. Since its initiation, the project maintained, and where necessary, accelerated its original schedule of activities as outlined in the approved application (pages 23 and 24).

III. PROJECT STATUS

This section of the performance report summarizes activities, accomplishments and outcomes of the three-year project in relationship to each of its objectives:

Objective 1: To Reduce the Severe and Long-Standing Shortage of Fully Trained Special Educators for Students with High-Incidence Disabilities in Rural Areas

Over the three years of the project, seventy-six (76) high-incidence special education teaching positions in rural Northeastern California were filled by this on-the-job training program. Annually, as stated in the approved application (page 11), the project provided $3,000 in student stipends for each of 25 candidates. In Year One, one student who received an initial, partial stipend of $1,100 subsequently dropped from the training program. Another student was named to receive the remaining $1,900 and upon her successful completion of the program during Year Two, received the equivalent of a full stipend.

Of the 76 stipend awardees, forty (40) completed coursework and field work competencies by June 2001 to qualify for credentialing as special education teachers of high-incidence populations; another twenty-three (23) are in final supervision this Spring 2002 semester and are scheduled for completion of their credentialing requirements by June 2002. Eight (8) stipend recipients are continuing in the training program in good standing and are expected to complete all requirements for full credentialing on or before June 2003. Their completion of coursework and supervision requirements is funded by the institutionalized university commitment. Of the remaining five (5) stipend recipients, one moved, one dropped the program, and three (3) were non-re-elected by the university and/or intern employer for continuance in the program. These five stipend recipients are also tracked by the university for their service obligation requirement.

To date, this record represents a **93%** rate of program retention and thus greatly exceeds the 80% retention rate specified as a desired outcome in the original application.

A second performance indicator for this objective was exceeded: on the annual (April, 2001) assessment of the Partnership, the Intern Program Council with area school administrators rated the effectiveness of the project in reducing the shortage of special educators as 6.1 on a 1-7 scale. On the same instrument, the Council rated as 6.0 the effectiveness of the project in developing and sustaining a collaborative regional relationship between the University and local school districts and county offices of education. In typical comments attached to each rating, public school administrators praised the ability of the project to increase the recruitment of rural residents more likely to remain in their area: "I am able to hire staff already committed to our county;" " Your project provides a local supply of qualified teachers."

Nonetheless, the shortage of special educators in this vast rural region continues. Although the project has made great gains in reducing this shortage, the impact of the California Class Size Reduction Initiative continues to reverberate through special education in the rural schools, further reducing the pool of qualified applicants and creating additional vacancies when veteran special educators move to smaller general education primary classes. In addition, special needs populations have increased in the area, programs have grown, and veteran teachers have retired or been promoted to administration. The remoteness of many of the region's rural corners also contributes strongly to the continuing severe shortage of fully trained teachers for students with disabilities. While the project to date therefore cannot claim the 75% rate of reduction in special education teaching vacancies in the region targeted in the application, it has reduced the personnel shortage in this remote, rural region by 71 positions.

Objective 2: Attract and Select the Best Candidates

Candidates were selected after an aggressive recruitment campaign held throughout the region. Intensive efforts were undertaken in order to attract "The Best" of candidates: program brochures were widely distributed, regional meetings held, and University-public school contracts set up with 42 LEAs. Careful screening by school districts and the University included: inspection of background experience including general education class teaching or paraprofessional experience; personal interviews; evidence of academic potential (3.0 GPA) for accelerated coursework; basic skills testing; and where possible, in-class performance assessments. Successful paraprofessionals living in the rural communities, particularly those from populations traditionally underrepresented in the profession, and including individuals with disabilities, were especially sought. Selected intern candidates demonstrated the qualities and skills perceived to both meet the unique needs of their local schools' special education programs and to support their successful retention in the profession.

An initial review of background questionnaires shows the average candidate has extensive experience with diverse populations, often coupled with experience as an instructional assistant or language instructor. Over the three years, nineteen (19) percent of stipend recipients had children or siblings with special needs. The average GPA of stipend recipients was a significantly high 3.42 and forty-two (42) percent were proficient in a second language. The average recipient's age was 35. Ten (10) percent were members of traditionally underrepresented groups in the profession, including individuals with disabilities. Over the three years of the project, we estimate a 60% rate of increase over earlier years was attained in the recruitment of targeted populations.

Objective 3: To Provide a Structure That Greatly Reduces the Personal, Professional, and Geographical Hardships of Obtaining a Special Education Credential

Distances from the rural counties of the region to the CSU, Chico campus often exceed 150 miles one-way, too far for students to pursue weekly coursework in a traditional campus program during the school year. For approximately four months of the year, inclement weather and treacherous road conditions in the Cascade mountain communities can prevent travel. By using interactive instructional television, web-site based instruction, release time classes, summer sessions, an electronic network, Individualized Induction Plans, video analyses, local mentoring, and dialogue journals, the project reduced the hardship of rural residents in obtaining a special education credential. Asked the question "How effective was the project in providing a structure that reduces the personal, professional, and geographic hardships of obtaining a special education credential?", the Intern Program Council (2001) on a 1-7 scale rated the project 6.2.

Objective 4: To Prepare Special Educators who will Effectively Meet Changing Needs of Special Education in California's Rural Schools

The region demands a program that prepares teachers to meet the needs of an increasing special needs population, as well as the increased socioeconomic, ethnic, and linguistic diversity within its schools. This project supported **76** students as they sought specialist credentialing specifically designed for the region in which they were placed as interns. Using a 1-7 scale, the Intern Program Council (2001) rated the project's effectiveness in preparing special educators who will effectively meet changing needs in special education and in California's rural schools a mean 5.8. Asked "How effective was the project in improving the special education profession in rural communities?," the Council rated the project a mean 5.9. Asked to define the program's strengths, public school administrators serving on the Council typically responded that the pre-

service and internship curricula produced highly educated teachers, well trained and effective in classrooms.

University Field Supervisor ratings were sought on each project participant who completed the training program. Asked "in general, after completing the internship, how well was this teacher prepared to perform as a special educator?" the average rating on a 0-7 scale (0= Not at all well and 7 = Exceptionally well), was 5.31. Ratings were also sought from public school employers of each project participant who completed the training program and served one full year beyond graduation. Asked the same question about the quality of the graduate's performance on the job, these public school administrators on average rated their experienced project graduates 5.50. As project participants continue to complete the program, further follow-up evaluation data will be sought on each stipend recipient.

The cycle of curriculum development, instructional planning, delivery of field supervision, and corresponding evaluation activities continued throughout the three years of the project. Identified in the original project performance report as in need of enhancement, program curricula in the following areas was systematically evaluated and re-designed: positive behavioral interventions and management, instructional strategies for inclusive settings, and computer technology for inclusive classroom practices and teacher professional development. The course in Technology for Special Educators, for example, was converted to an on-line structure, making the vital content accessible to even the most remote corners of the region.

The following table presents overall course effectiveness ratings for courses in the intern structure over the three-year period. In addition to this composite score, each instructional objective in each course was rated for effectiveness of presentation and student mastery level. Project Co-Directors Lisa Churchill and Mary Jensen reviewed these results each semester with

teaching faculty and formulated plans for continuous improvement. For example, review of course effectiveness ratings for SPED 346M: Advanced Curriculum Content for Students with Mild/Moderate Disabilities indicated that interns rated this course relatively lower than other courses due to student resistance felt towards technological assessment innovations. This data will be used to implement course changes for Fall semester 2002. The lasting effect of this project effort is seen now: as the project officially closes, the improved courses remain.

TABLE 1
COURSE EFFECTIVENESS RATINGS: 1999-2001
(SCALE: 0-7, 7 = Extremely Effective)

Number and Name of Course	Overall Mean Effectiveness Rating by Year		
	1999	**2000**	**2001**
SPED 143: Overview of Special Education	5.91	6.03	6.0
SPED 346L: Curriculum and Instruction -- Mild/Moderate Disabilities	6.34	5.3	5.47
SPED 346M: Advanced Curriculum Content - Mild/Moderate Disabilities	6.21	5.47	4.44
SPED 345: Classroom Management for Individuals with Exceptional Needs	6.0	6.46	6.13
PSY 251: Assessment and Evaluation in General and Special Education	6.5	5.82	6.38
SPED 344H: Home/School/Community Relations in General and Special Education	6.22	6.36	6.33
SPED 244C: Collaboration in Education and the Helping Professions	6.0	6.34	6.44
SPED 348J: Consultation and Staff Development	6.06	4.5	5.86
EDTE 229C: Reading/Language Arts in the Multilingual Setting: CLAD/BCLAD Emphases	Not offered	Not offered	6.43
	1999	**2000**	**2001**
OVERALL AVERAGE: Project Courses Each Year	**6.16**	**5.79**	**5.94**

Objective 5: Fashion a Support Structure for Teacher Assistance and Retention

Early project data indicated some unevenness in the frequency and quality of local mentor support. As a result of their dialogue with the Intern Program Council and with candidates, project faculty focused upon the area of local support as the central target for project improvement in Years 2 and 3.

The project provided stipends and release time for a local support provider to mentor each candidate. In the improvements which began Fall 2000, each region of the partnership was also served by a university regional mentor leader provided by institutional funds.

There exists a strong theoretical base for this augmentation. The research of McIntyre and Hagger (1996) suggests that both support and rigour are required if the mentoring process is to promote professional development. Their findings are based on six research teams from Oxford University, Manchester, Metropolitan University, Keele, Sussex, Swansea and Leicester Universities. Field's (1994) discussion of the teacher-mentor also emphasizes that mentoring should go beyond support to facilitate professional growth: "There is a distinction," he states (p. 67), "between social support that puts newcomers at ease and professional support that advances knowledge and practice." The work of Elliott and Calderhead (1993) similarly advocates a two-dimensional model of challenge and support to enhance professional growth.

In McIntyre and Hagger's view, the successively complex levels of support are:

- Level 1 - PEER SUPPORT - Basic level mentoring that involves a personal relationship in which a relative novice is supported by a more experienced peer in coming to terms with a new role.

- Level 2 - PERSONAL SUPPORT, GUIDANCE, TEACHING, AND CHALLENGE - Mentoring also involves active guidance, teaching, and challenging of the protégé (intern) by the mentor, who accordingly needs to claim some expertise, wisdom, and authority.
- Level 3 - PLANNED AND MANAGED SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULA - Mentoring additionally involves the management and implementation of a planned curriculum tailored to the needs of the individual, and including collaboration with other contributors in one's own and other institutions.

The Partnership explored ways to improve the Support Network throughout this grant project. Project personnel were acutely aware of the challenges facing special education intern teachers who are learners (similar to student teachers) on the job, while simultaneously performing as teachers (beginning teachers), whose learning may be perceived as secondary to their work within their local school sites. An enhanced structural support system for our region was implemented and addressed the three levels described above.

In the first semester of each candidate's program, university regional mentor leaders offered direct assistance to the interns and facilitated the support network in each separate county, conducting regional focus groups and visiting the interns' classrooms, their site administrators and local support providers. A formal conference was held for every intern, bringing together the candidate, local support provider, university regional mentor leader and, whenever possible, the public school administrator, to review the program structure, clarify the individual responsibilities for each participant, and record the candidate's goals on an Individualized Induction Plan (IIP). This individualized induction plan (IIP), aligned to the new California State standards, outlined coursework, individual assistance, and professional

development opportunities that the beginning teacher would pursue to address the established performance goals and California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP).

After the regional mentor leader worked for several months with the intern and local support provider, transition meetings were held to formally shift the major responsibilities for support during the next two semesters, to the local school site. Assistance from the regional mentor leader or university supervisor, if deemed more appropriate, was also provided during this time. At the conclusion of the program, the fourth semester, the University supervisor assessed the intern for the state credential competencies. Throughout the training period, experienced University faculty supervisors were available to assist in assessing needs of the interns and programming any needed remediation.

The CSU, Chico Department of Professional Studies in Education continued to conduct a formal evaluation of university faculty, regional mentor leaders, and local support providers each year of project implementation, asking candidates to provide written evaluative statements regarding such factors as level of support, feedback, modeling, and guidance. In addition, feedback was sought annually from regional mentor leaders, support providers, the Internship Program Council/Advisory Board and university faculty regarding the effectiveness of the support and supervision network as a whole.

Asked "How effective was the project in establishing a support structure that both assisted on-the-job trainees and encouraged the retention of special educators?" The Program Intern Council (2001), on a 1-7 scale rated the structure a mean 6.14. Qualitative comments in response to the survey question, "What are the program's strengths?" included: "Support- great supervision meets 'distance' needs of remote areas." Another partner stated, "Good support from

university supervisor, which combined with district support creates the appropriate professional preparation required in this demanding field."

GPRA Program Performance Indicators

"A Rural Regional Partnership for Recruiting and Retaining Teachers for Children with High-Incidence Disabilities" addressed the five objectives from the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and assessed project performance based on GPRA program performance indicators. Performance indicators were measured quantitatively and qualitatively, continuously over the three years of project implementation; using multiple means of data collection (student and administrator questionnaires). Overall, a discrepancy between administrators' perceptions and those of students was found. The students tended to rate items lower than the administrators on the questionnaire items. Several reasons may account for this discrepancy. First, this discrepancy may be a reflection of self-confidence among regional intern graduates as perceived by administrators. Secondly, the timing of student questionnaires (immediately after course completion) may in fact be problematic. The student perspective at this time may be limited and not encompass the view of regional strength that administrators say is provided by project graduates. Thirdly, individual teachers are simply not in a position to judge global attributes of their region. In response to this discrepancy, future data collection on student perspectives will focus on interns' own confidence as beginning teachers and how well they personally feel prepared to meet changing rural needs. A brief discussion of the GPRA five objectives and our project's performance on these indicators follows.

Objective 1: Programs respond to the critical needs of children with disabilities and their families.

Indicator 1.1 Responsive to need. The purpose of this project as stated in the original grant proposal was to "improve the educational services for pupils with disabilities and their families within this vast service region by addressing the critical need for both quantity and quality of personnel." All of the project's five objectives were designed to be responsive to the critical needs of children with disabilities and their families. Public school administrators, on 1-7 scale, rated the project "in providing effective services to pupils with disabilities and their families "an average 5.8 over the project's three years of implementation. The students' average rating was 5.1, on the same 1-7 scale.

Administrators' ratings and students' ratings differed on program effectiveness "in preparing special educators who will effectively meet changing needs in special education and in California's rural schools. Administrators' rated this performance indicator an average 5.9, on a scale of 1-7, for the three years of the project. The students' rating was an average 4.9. Overall, results indicate that this project was responsive to the critical needs of children with disabilities and their families. However, the discrepancy between student data and administrator data reveals that there is still a need for program improvement in this area.

Objective 2: Projects use high quality methods and materials.

The project's theoretical underpinnings, methods and materials reflected up-to-date knowledge from research and practice in special education, high incidence disabilities (mild or moderate retardation, emotional disturbance (ED), specific learning disabilities, language impairments), teacher preparation, multicultural education, and teacher development as outlined in the original grant proposal. Research-based strategies that enhance "collaboration for integration" for children with high-incidence disabilities were emphasized. Data for GPRA Performance Indicator 2.1 Highest standards for methods and materials was collected as

effectiveness ratings in "placing quality special educators in your area's classroom." This data was collected on multiple instruments, continuously over the three years of project implementation. Responses were averaged and administrators rated this item, an average 5.9, on a 1-7 scale; whereas, the students rated this item an average 5.0. It is interesting to note that the student data also indicated an improvement between project years two and three; revealing an increase in this GPRA performance indicator over time.

Objective 3: Projects communicate appropriately and products are used to improve results for children with disabilities and their families.

Indicator 3.1 Communication. The percentage of IDEA-funded projects that communicate appropriately with target audiences will increase. This performance indicator was also measured at multiple time points and with multiple instruments. Analysis of the data indicates that this GPRA objective was met very strongly with our targeted audience of public school administrators, parents, mentors, and university faculty who rated the collaborative regional partnership with an averaged 6.2, on a 1-7 scale.

Indicator 3.2 Use results. Products and practices developed through IDEA programs are used to improve results for children with disabilities. This objective was measured on student and administrator questionnaires each year during the project implementation time. Data for this objective was gathered as an average effectiveness rating on "improvement in the special education profession in rural communities." Public school administrators rated this item an average 6.2, on a 1-7 scale. Whereas, the students rated this item an average 5.4. Although a point range exists between the perceptions of the administrators and the students, results indicate that funding for this IDEA program has supported products and practices that have measurably improved results for children with disabilities.

Objective 4: Personnel are prepared to serve children with disabilities.

Indicator 4.1 Persons trained to serve children with disabilities. The percentage of persons who obtained their degrees with IDEA support and serve children with disabilities as teachers within 3 years of receiving their degrees will increase. To date, of the 76 stipend awardees, 40 completed coursework and field competencies and qualified for credentialing as special education teachers of high-incidence populations in June 2001; 23 are in final supervision this semester and are scheduled for completion of credentialing requirements by June 2002, and 8 are continuing in the training program in good standing and are expected to complete all requirements for full credentialing in June 2003. This represents a 93% rate of retention and thus greatly exceeds the 80 % retention rate specified as an outcome in the application.

Indicator 4.3 Minority and disabled personnel. The percentage of personnel who are minority and the percentage who are disabled who receive financial assistance for training under IDEA will increase. During the reported period, an estimated 60% rate of increase over earlier years was attained in recruitment and retention of targeted populations.

Objective 5: Families receive information about services for children with disabilities.

Indicator 5.1 Informed families. This project incorporates a "parent information and communication" strand within the preparation and training of special educators from the first required pre-service class to the capstone seminar. Parents of children with disabilities are co-presenters and instructors throughout the preparation program. Recruitment efforts target special education paraprofessionals who have worked in the local rural school district and are also parents of children with disabilities.

IV. BUDGET INFORMATION

This project was granted a one-month extension (changing its conclusion from November 30, 2001 to December 31, 2001) in order to allow the full Fall 2001 semester costs and services to proceed as outlined in the application. All funds were expended as projected. All applicant matching funds have been contributed as scheduled during each of the three years.

V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION/CHANGES

As in last year's performance report, no major problems have arisen in project implementation. The approved grant application appeared to have incorporated ample strategies for dealing preventively with challenges likely to be met in the course of any partnership.